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DE RUEHJM #4029/01 2491444  
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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4765  
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

UNCLAS JERUSALEM 004029

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR WILLIAMS/MAHER/STEINGER;  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS; TREASURY FOR  
SZUBIN/LOEFFLER/NUGENT/HIRSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EFIN](#) [KWGB](#)

SUBJECT: WIDE PARTICIPATION AS GENERAL STRIKE ENTERS FIFTH  
DAY

REF: JERUSALEM 3949

¶1. Summary: A general strike by PA employees in protest of non-payment of salaries since March (see ref) entered its fifth day, September 6. Union leaders have estimated 80-90 percent PA employee participation. Although the strike is more comprehensive in the West Bank than in Gaza, it has brought much of the public school system to a halt. A commercial strike in the West Bank and a demonstration in front of the PLC headquarters in Gaza occurred September 5. In conversations with the ConGen, numerous Fatah and affiliated officials have welcomed the PA employees' strike and described it as creating an opportunity for PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) to confront Hamas and take difficult political decisions. End summary.

#### GENERAL STRIKE

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¶2. (SBU) The current general strike by PA employees entered its fifth day with wide participation, especially in the West Bank. The strikes have been organized by Fatah-dominated unions as part of a political strategy to increase pressure on the Hamas government. President Abbas has lent support to the strikes in his public comments. Fatah-affiliated public sector union leaders reported that roughly 90 percent of PA employees in the West Bank and 80 percent of employees in Gaza have participated to date in the open-ended strike. Speaking to the press, PA spokesperson Ghazi Hamad September 4 warned that those union leaders responsible for the strike - especially Fatah-affiliated Bassam Zakarnah, head of the Palestinian Union of Public Employees - will be dealt with according to the law.

#### TEACHERS' STRIKE

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¶3. (SBU) The strike has largely shut down the public school system in the West Bank. Mohammed Al-Sawwan, Chairman of the General Federation of Palestinian Teachers, told the press that over 75 percent of PA teachers adhered to the strike on September 2. PA teachers have gathered in front of the Ministry of Education in Ramallah each day to protest the non-payment of their salaries. Palestinian radio stated September 5 that Hamas had accused Fatah of forcing schools in Jenin and Ramallah to close, while Fatah had accused Hamas of forcing public schools in Gaza to open.

¶4. (SBU) USAID Gaza-based staff report that the teachers'

strike has not been as widespread in Gaza, and that only 20 of the 350 schools in Gaza were completely closed September 12. According to USAID Gaza-based staff, many Hamas-affiliated teachers have gone to work, while those Fatah-affiliated teachers have generally not. Arabic daily al-Hayat al-Jadida reported September 3 that a school principal in Rafah was beaten by a Hamas Ministry of Interior force because he did not open his school on September 2. In Hamas-dominated areas of Gaza, schools are operating as usual, while schools in Fatah-dominated areas have been open, but classrooms are mostly empty.

#### GAZA PLC

15. (SBU) Dozens of PLC employees held a sit-in strike on September 4 in front of the PLC offices in Gaza to protest the non-payment of salaries. The employees reportedly held signs urging PLC members to find a solution to the non-payment of salaries in order to end employees' suffering.

#### COMMERCIAL STRIKE IN WEST BANK

16. (SBU) Merchants in several large West Bank cities, with the encouragement of Fatah, held a commercial strike on September 5 in a show of solidarity with the PA employees. Mazen Sinokrot, former Minister of National Economy, told FSN economic specialist that roughly 85 percent of all commercial entities in Ramallah were closed September 5. Imad Musseibeh Nusipeh, a major farmer in the Jordan Valley, told FSN economic specialist that 100 percent of commercial entities in Jericho were closed on September 5, adding that PA police ordered shop owners to close down in order to express

solidarity with the PA employees. Press reports stated that merchants in the cities of Bethlehem, Jenin and Nablus participated in the commercial strike as well.

17. (SBU) Said Sabi, head of the Qalqiliya Chamber of Commerce, told FSN economic specialist that less than 20 percent of commercial entities in Qalqiliya closed September 15. Sabi added that local businesspeople had not received pressure to close their shops from Fatah or any other group, and for that reason, everything remained open.

#### FATAH LOOKING FOR ABU MAZEN TO SEIZE THE INITIATIVE

18. (SBU) Numerous Fatah and affiliated officials have welcomed the PA employees' strike in several conversations with ConGen. Former PLC member Ahmad Abdel Rahman, speaking with poloff, described the strikes as an opportunity for Abu Mazen that would create political space for the PA President to take difficult political decisions. Al-Ayyam editor Akran Haniya told the Consul General that he believes the strikes are significant. He said that he hoped they would help the current political crisis and likened them to a "peaceful intifadah." PLO Executive Committee member Yasser Abed Rabo also expressed enthusiasm to the Consul General about the strikes shortly before they began and following Abu Mazen's speech to protesters at the Muqata. Abed Rabo suggested the strikes could change the political dynamic and help Abu Mazen to confront Hamas with popular support. Members of the Fatah High Committee Qadurra Faris and Hatem Abdel Kader said they do not expect immediate steps from Abu Mazen, but they believe that the employees will continue to strike until they are paid, which, they argue, should eventually encourage Abu Mazen to take action.

WALLES